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Atari Online News, Etc.  
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~ The Queen, On Facebook! ~ Facebook Email Service ~ Call of Duty Stolen!

-\* Trend Micro Declares MS Foul \*-  
-\* Google Data Collection Investigation \*-  
-\* GOP Election Victory Dooms Net Neutrality! \*-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard

"Saying it like it is!"

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It's been a long 'short' week this past week! The Veterans Day holiday in the middle of the week cut back the amount of news that made headlines this week, as well as available time to collect it all. But, Veterans Day is a significant holiday in this country, celebrating our nation's large group of military veterans. It doesn't matter if you're a hawk or a dove, we owe an immense amount of gratitude to those who have fought to protect all that we hold dear in this country.

The Fall season has reached us and going strong. All it takes here in the Northeast is to see the amount of leaves laying about! I've cleaned my yard a couple of times already, but it's once again blanketed with more leaves. And yea, I'll be at it again this weekend cleaning them up again! It's a seasonal task that won't go away on its own, so I'll just spend the time that it takes to complete it. A couple of more time and the yard should do it, I hope!

On an editorial note, there won't be a People Are Talking column this week. No, Joe isn't ailing. The omission this week is, however, due to a very good reason - Joe has finally found a job and is busy getting himself acclimated to his new endeavors. We'll see his return next week, so don't fret! It's good to see Joe back in the rolls of the employed!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Call of Duty: Black Ops Stolen at Gunpoint!  
"-----" Sony's 'Gran Turismo 5' Coming!  
'It's on Like Donkey Kong'!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

"-----"

## Call of Duty: Black Ops Stolen at Gunpoint

Video game violence hit a little too close to home last weekend, as armed robbers in Maryland held up a video game store and ran off with 100 unreleased copies of the combat-themed Call of Duty: Black Ops video game.

According to a statement from the Harford Sheriff's Office, at least two men wielding semi-automatic handguns burst into a GameStop store in the Festival at Bel Air shopping mall, as it was closing on Saturday night. While robbing the store, two customers walked in and were forced into a backroom at gunpoint.

The robbers ran off with four crates of 'Black Ops,' cash from the register and several gaming systems. No one was hurt.

The suspects are still at large and a sheriff spokeswoman told the Baltimore Sun that anyone who has the game should report it to the Harford police immediately.

Developed by Treyarch and published by Activision, Black Ops is the latest installment of the popular Call of Duty series. At least a few analysts expect it to be one of the best-selling video games of all time. Pre-sales have already overtaken Activision's Modern Warfare 2, which debuted this time last year and grossed \$1 billion by January.

Black Ops puts players in the middle of the wilderness for first-person guerilla warfare, and includes Treyarch's trademark Nazi zombies. It has been rated "mature" for intense violence, strong language, and blood and gore.

The 3D-ready game will be released for Playstation 3, Xbox 360, and Windows PCs. It will also be available on the Nintendo Wii in the non-3D version.

## Sony's 'Gran Turismo 5' Coming

After several delays, Sony's "Gran Turismo 5" is set to be released on November 24, the company announced Friday.

The long-awaited game, available for the PlayStation 3, will hit stores the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in North America. Pre-orders are being accepted now via Amazon, Best Buy, GameStop, Target, and Walmart for the \$59.99 standard edition. Amazon, Best Buy, and Walmart are also selling a \$99.99 collector's edition, which includes a 1:43 scale collectible diecast car, a 300-page guide to cars and racing techniques, a GT-branded key chain, a voucher for five DLC cars, and a numbered certificate of authenticity.

"Gran Turismo 5 is an ambitious project, with challenges and complexities which have made it our version of the Apollo Space Program" Kazunori Yamauchi, president of game studio Polyphony Digital, said in a statement. "When we created the original Gran Turismo back in 1997, we wanted to set

a completely new precedent for the racing genre. With the technological leap onto PlayStation 3, our objective with Gran Turismo 5 was to create another great revolution which would not only satisfy our own high expectations, but would meet or even exceed the anticipation of the fans."

"Gran Turismo 5" was slated to go on sale in Japan in March, but that was pushed to November 2. In October, however, executives announced that the release would again be delayed, but would arrive in time for the holidays.

"Satisfying the loyal Gran Turismo followers is at the heart of all of our efforts, which is why it was such a difficult decision to delay the release of the game, and one which we did not take lightly," Yamauchi said Friday. "I can only apologize to everyone for making you wait so long, and I hope that when you try out the wealth of driving experiences available in Gran Turismo 5, you will not be disappointed."

"Gran Turismo 5" brings players to the world's most famous racetracks like Nurburgring and the Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca, Sony said. It includes a lineup of over 1,000 in-game cars, including the Lamborghini Murcielago LP 670-4 SuperVeloce, the Lexus LFA, and the McLaren MP4-12C.

A version of the game for the PlayStation Portable was released last year, but the last major overhaul of the racing simulator, Gran Turismo 4, was released in 2005.

#### Nintendo Eyes 'It's on Like Donkey Kong' Trademark

Nintendo's anticipated 'Donkey Kong Country Returns' finally lands on November, 21st, but the company is commemorating the launch early with an incredibly atypical publicity maneuver. Despite Nintendo's beloved reputation as an unconventional and fan-friendly entity, it reportedly intends to trademark and protect a quirky piece of pop culture.

According to CNN, Nintendo hopes to trademark the phrase "It's on like 'Donkey Kong.'" (Et tu, Nintendo?) The company issued a press release lauding "Donkey Kong's status as an enduring pop-culture icon and video game superstar," and the ubiquitous presence of the phrase in "popular music, television and film over the years." The press release doesn't address the possible repercussions of improperly busting the rhyme, but - just to be certain - fitting and similar alternatives certainly exist. "It's on like Diddy Kong!" has a better ring to it anyway.

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A-ONE's Headline News  
The Latest in Computer Technology News  
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Republican Victory in US Election Dooms 'Net Neutrality'

The stunning Republican gains in the US elections appear to have doomed efforts to pass a "net neutrality" bill that would require Internet service providers to treat all Web traffic equally.

President Barack Obama, Democrats in Congress and Silicon Valley have backed net neutrality but it has met with opposition from telecom and cable companies and many Republicans who see it as unnecessary government regulation.

With the Republicans seizing control of the House of Representatives in Tuesday's vote and picking up half-a-dozen seats in the Senate, analysts said net neutrality is not expected to make any headway in Congress.

"There's essentially no prospect of a net neutrality bill passing anytime soon," said Richard Bennett, a senior fellow at the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation.

Bennett, in a blog post at Hightechforum.org, noted that all 95 Democratic members of the House and Senate who had signed a public pledge to protect an "open Internet" had lost their seats in the Republican tidal wave.

"This election puts net neutrality on the back burner, and raises the importance of spectrum, intellectual property protection, and Internet privacy," Bennett said.

While disagreeing on net neutrality, many Republicans and Democrats agree there is a pressing need to auction off more wireless communications spectrum to cope with the explosion of mobile devices.

Another issue that appears headed for the back burner is immigration reform, which has been pushed by technology companies eager for visas for skilled engineers and software programmers from countries such as India.

"The Republican gains though are likely to make it more difficult to get comprehensive immigration reforms passed, which the tech industry has supported," said Ed Black, president of the Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA).

While net neutrality and comprehensive immigration reform appear to be out of reach, the new Congress being sworn in in January can be expected to move forward on some technology legislation.

"Many tech issues are bipartisan," said Black, citing cybersecurity and online privacy protection as areas where Democrats and Republicans can find common ground.

A number of bipartisan cybersecurity bills are already wending their way through Congress while the 1986 Electronic Communications Privacy Act is also being examined to bring it into the Internet age.

Tuesday's vote also saw the defeat of a US congressman who has been a prominent voice in technology issues for a long time and the election of a senator who has been a thorn in the side of technology giants.

Representative Rick Boucher, a Democrat from Virginia and net neutrality advocate who chaired the House subcommittee on Communications, Technology, and the Internet, lost his re-election bid.

Elected to the Senate was Richard Blumenthal, who as the attorney general

of Connecticut spearheaded probes into adult services advertisements on Craigslist and Google's "Street View" online mapping service.

Tuesday's election also saw two high-profile former chief executives of technology companies, both Republicans, lose their bids for elected office in California.

Former eBay chief executive Meg Whitman lost the governor's race despite spending more than 160 million dollars of her own money on her campaign and former Hewlett-Packard chief executive Carly Fiorina failed in her Senate bid.

#### FCC Opens Inquiry into Google Data Collection

The Federal Communications Commission is investigating whether Google Inc. broke the law by inadvertently sucking up fragments of e-mails, Internet passwords, Web surfing behavior and other online activities over public Wi-Fi networks while photographing neighborhoods for its "Street View" mapping feature.

The probe by the FCC comes two weeks after the Federal Trade Commission concluded its own inquiry into the problem, which Google said it discovered following an investigation by German regulators.

While the FTC criticized the search giant for collecting potentially sensitive information over unsecured wireless networks for several years before realizing it, the agency said it is satisfied that Google has taken adequate measures to improve its internal privacy controls. Those include privacy training for all 23,000 of the company's employees

The FCC inquiry, first reported by The Wall Street Journal, will focus on whether Google violated a federal law that prohibits the unauthorized publication or use of messages intercepted over radio networks.

"As the agency charged with overseeing the public airwaves, we are committed to ensuring that the consumers affected by this breach of privacy receive a full and fair accounting," Michele Ellison, head of the FCC's Enforcement Bureau, said in a statement.

Google has said it gathered about 600 gigabytes of data - enough to fill about six floors of an academic library - in more than 30 nations and wants to delete all of the information as soon it's cleared to do so in all affected countries. But the company is facing a number of investigations both in the U.S. and overseas.

In addition to the FCC, a coalition of state attorneys general is examining the data collection and several prominent House members have criticized the company. Authorities in several other countries, including Italy, are also looking into the problem.

Last month, an investigation by Canada's Privacy Commissioner concluded that Google violated Canadian privacy law by collecting highly sensitive personal information - including complete e-mail messages, e-mail addresses, telephone numbers and even personal medical details - affecting thousands of citizens. The report blamed the episode on "an engineer's careless error as well as a lack of controls to ensure that necessary procedures to protect privacy were followed."

Reacting to the FCC inquiry on Wednesday, Google stressed that the incident was simply a mistake, that it did not want the data and that it has never used the information in any of its products and services. "As we have said before, we are profoundly sorry for having mistakenly collected payload data from unencrypted networks," the company said in a statement.

#### Trend Micro Calls Foul Over Microsoft Offering Free AV Software Via Windows Update

Microsoft this week began offering U.S. customers its free antivirus program via Windows' built-in update service, a move one major security firm said may be anticompetitive.

Last Monday, Microsoft started adding Security Essentials to the optional download list seen by U.S. users running Windows XP, Vista, or Windows 7 when they fired up the operating system's update service. The move followed an Oct. 19 kickoff of a similar program in the U.K.

"Commercializing Windows Update to distribute other software applications raises significant questions about unfair competition," said Carol Carpenter, the general manager of the consumer and small business group at Trend Micro, on Thursday.

"Windows Update is a de facto extension of Windows, so to begin delivering software tied to updates has us concerned," she added. "Windows Update is not a choice for users, and we believe it should not be used this way."

If Windows doesn't detect working security software on the PC, Microsoft adds Security Essentials to the Optional section of Microsoft Update, a superset of the better-known Windows Update, or to Windows Update if it has been configured to also draw downloads from Microsoft Update.

Microsoft made a point to say that it was not offering Security Essentials via Window Update, but only through the Microsoft Update service, which also offers patches for new versions of non-operating system software, notably Office and Windows Media Player.

But most users won't understand the distinction because of the way that Microsoft has intermingled the two services.

In Vista and Windows 7, for example, Windows Update is configured out of the box to also poll Microsoft Update. And although Microsoft Update was once optional in Windows XP, new PCs with new installations of the OS now use Microsoft Update as the default update service.

"We welcome competition on a level playing field," said Carpenter of Trend Micro. "What concerns us is a vendor using market leverage to drive its solution in some unfair way."

Microsoft defended the practice, saying it was giving customers a convenient way to acquire antivirus software.

"We are always looking for the most effective and efficient ways to ensure our customers are protected against viruses, spyware and other malicious threats," said Jeff Smith, director of marketing for Security Essentials, in an e-mail reply to questions. "By offering Security

Essentials as an optional download for PCs that are unprotected, we make it easy for those who want and know they need protection, but for whatever reason have not gotten around to installing it."

When asked to respond to rivals' anticompetitive concerns, Smith reiterated that Microsoft was not forcing users to download its product. "[It's] an optional download that customers with no antivirus solution can elect to download and install," he said. "[This is] just one of many options available to customers to get security software."

Other security vendors, including Symantec and McAfee, declined to say whether they, like Trend Micro, viewed Microsoft's move as anticompetitive or unfair. Instead, they downplayed Security Essentials' effectiveness.

"It's clear that today's threat landscape requires more comprehensive protection than what Microsoft Security Essentials offers," said Symantec in a statement. "From a security perspective, this Microsoft tool offers reduced defenses at a critical point in the battle against cybercrime."

McAfee took the same tack.

"Options that provide an elementary level of security, including Microsoft Security Essentials, mostly rely on traditional protection mechanisms," McAfee said. "McAfee products offer not only more features but most importantly, McAfee products offer real-time protection using cloud-based intelligence to combat even the most sophisticated threats."

All three vendors scoffed at the idea that they're scared of free antivirus rivals, and by implication, Security Essentials. "We've competed against free for a long time," said Carpenter. "We've not seen [free products have] much impact on our market share."

This isn't the first time that security companies and Microsoft have butted heads.

In 2006, Symantec and McAfee complained to European Union antitrust regulators about Microsoft's decision to block them from accessing the kernel in the 64-bit version of Vista, and barring them from its new integrated security center. Microsoft bowed to the pressure, and later promised to produce APIs (application programming interfaces) that gave security vendors some access to the kernel and allowed them to mesh their product's on-screen status features with the security center.

Carpenter declined to say whether Trend Micro would consider legal action against Microsoft over the issue, but said that her company "was always looking at issues like this."

In a follow-up e-mail, Carpenter was clearer. "We're concerned that Microsoft may be using its OS-based market leverage to box out other choices. If that were to happen, it would not be good for consumers or the industry, and would warrant a second look."

Trend was aware of the Security Essentials offer in the U.K. that started last month, but Microsoft's decision to do the same in the U.S. caught it by surprise. "We work with Microsoft on a lot of levels," Carpenter said, but added that Microsoft had not told Trend Micro it was expanding the deal to the U.S.

Not all eligible U.S. users have seen the Security Essentials offer because Microsoft is rolling it out over the course of the month, the company said.

Users who decline the download and then want to block the offer from reappearing can do so by right-clicking on the Security Essentials item, then selecting "Hide update" from the drop-down menu.

### Rockmelt: The Facebook of Web Browsers

A new Web browser, Rockmelt debuts in limited beta Monday and aims to help you keep tabs on your Facebook friends and your favorite sites, and make your Web searches faster. Backed by Netscape founder Marc Andreessen, Rockmelt was first reported on by The New York Times in August 2009. At the time, Rockmelt was supposedly going to be a next-generation Web browser designed to take advantage of new Web applications and services.

A year later, and Rockmelt appears to be nothing more than another social networking-focused browser similar to Flock. Just like Flock, Rockmelt incorporates your social networking activity into browser sidebars so you can stay up to date on your friends' activities while you browse other parts of the Web. Unlike Flock, however, Rockmelt features a single sign-on profile tied to your Facebook ID that you can carry with you using any computer running Rockmelt. Both browsers are based on Chromium, Google's open source project that is basically a test ground for Google Chrome.

If you'd like to try out Rockmelt, you can sign up for the limited beta at Rockmelt.com by signing in with your Facebook ID.

I haven't had a chance to get my hands on Rockmelt yet, but here's a look at some of the key features of the world's latest social-focused browser.

You can use Rockmelt as you would any normal Web browser by just firing it up and surfing the Web. But Rockmelt's real power is unlocked when you log into the browser using your Facebook ID. This allows the browser to display a list of your Facebook friends in a slim sidebar on the left side of the browser window; feeds from your favorite sites in a sidebar on the right; and stores your browser bookmarks and preferences.

All of this personalized information is saved on Rockmelt's servers so that you can access it by logging into the Rockmelt browser from any computer. Rockmelt does not, however, save your Web searches or browsing history, according to an interview with Rockmelt co-founders Eric Vishria and Tim Howes by blogger Robert Scoble. The company also says that all of your personal data is stored as an encrypted bundle on its servers to keep it private. It's not clear if Rockmelt has the ability to decrypt your data, but the company does say they are not interested in your information for the purposes of ad targeting.

It should be noted that in addition to being an investor in Rockmelt, Andreessen also sits on Facebook's board of directors.

On the left side of your browser window is a thin sidebar that lists the Facebook profile pictures of your "favorite" Facebook friends. It's not clear how Rockmelt determines which people are your favorite Facebook friends or how you can change that setting.

As you hover over each picture in the left sidebar you see a summary of

their latest Facebook activity, such as whether they have an updated status or how many photos they've uploaded recently. Clicking on the profile photo opens a small pop-up window where you can see their recent Facebook activity at the top along with a chat area on the bottom for instant messaging.

Your own Facebook profile photo sits at the top of the left-hand column and you can click on it to update your Facebook status from there.

On the other side of your browser window is a second sidebar where you can get feeds from your favorite sites including news sources such as /The New York Times/ or CNN. You can also add other social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Rockmelt didn't explain what the differences are between the Facebook updates on the left side and right side of the browser. If I had to guess, however, I would say that including Facebook in your right sidebar shows you updates from your newsfeed, while the left sidebar features select updates from your "favorite" Facebook friends.

As each site is updated, an unread count appears next to the site's icon telling you how many new articles or updates there are. Clicking on a site brings up another pop-up window that shows you a summary of the new stuff you haven't seen. If you'd like to read further, clicking on the link for each article brings it up in the main browser window.

If you put your Twitter account in the right sidebar, you can click on the Twitter icon to send out an update, reply or retweet a message and access any Twitter lists you subscribe to.

Rockmelt also has a share bookmarklet in the browser toolbar to let you quickly share links with your friends on Facebook and Twitter.

Rockmelt features two search boxes: a regular Chrome-style Omnibox and a special Rockmelt search field. Rockmelt's search feature is designed to help you get to your Web results faster, and the company said it wanted to make search as "simple as leafing through a magazine."

Let's say you were searching for information about flu shots, and the top search results were links to the Center for Disease Control, Wikipedia, and a CNN news item followed by four other site links. Rockmelt would display the results just as you would see them in Google in a drop down menu. You would then see a preview of each site in the main browser window as you scrolled through your results in the drop down menu. So you could preview the content from the CDC, Wikipedia, CNN, and so on until you find what you're looking for.

If you just want typical Google results then you can use the Omnibox instead of Rockmelt's dedicated search box.

Rockmelt appears to be an interesting take on integrating social features into your Web browsing and the new search feature could be useful. But Rockmelt has a tough road ahead to gain a foothold in an already crowded browser market that includes Apple's Safari, Google Chrome, Microsoft Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Opera, Flock, and many others.

As its mobile devices lose ground, Research In Motion's decision to sell its jumbo BlackBerry, the PlayBook tablet, for less than \$500 could help the company gain some traction. The Wi-Fi-equipped PlayBook has a seven-inch touchscreen and front and back cameras for video conferencing, unlike Apple's popular but camera-less 9.1-inch iPad.

The PlayBook will launch in North America in the first quarter next year and globally in the second quarter.

At the Group of 20 Business Summit in Seoul, Korea, this week, RIM co-CEO Jim Balsillie told news organizations that the device will sell for less than \$500. The iPad's basic 16GB model with Wi-Fi sells for \$499.

"A price under \$500 enables a media tablet to reach a broader audience," said ABI Research analyst Jeff Orr.

The PlayBook is thin and light for traveling business users, has security options through the BlackBerry Enterprise Server, and supports Adobe Flash for video content, which is banned on Apple's mobile devices. That combination of features might make it a formidable iPad rival compared to other tablets like Samsung's Galaxy Tab, which went on sale this week.

"Professionals and business users are showing interest in a touchscreen companion computing device that allows easy interaction with frequently used applications for both home and work lifestyles," Orr said. "RIM's approach with PlayBook is to provide a Wi-Fi-enabled device initially that also synchronizes with BlackBerry smartphones."

But Orr said adoption of the devices in the workplace could pose a challenge to IT teams that will have to integrate them with current services, applications and security systems.

"Supporting any and every consumer device in the enterprise is cost-prohibitive," he said. "RIM's attempt to extend its IT-friendly BlackBerry solution to media tablets could give it a leg up on media-tablet vendors squarely focused on infotainment and delivering an excellent consumer experience in and around the home."

Devices powered by RIM's BlackBerry OS made up 14.8 percent of the market in the third quarter compared to the 16.7 percent share running Apple's iOS, according to Gartner Research.

The PlayBook will be powered by an operating system made by Canada-based QNX Software Systems, a RIM subsidiary. Most other recent tablet devices, including the Galaxy Tab, Toshiba's Folio100, and the Archos 7, are powered by Google's Android.

Verizon Wireless and T-Mobile will sell the Galaxy Tab for \$599, though T-Mobile will offer it for \$399 with a two-year data plan.

"Keep in mind that the 'sweet spot' for consumer electronics in the U.S. is still \$200," Orr said. "Products priced below that threshold are more likely to be purchased on an impulse, while those priced above the mark require more budgeting and consideration before the purchase."

The Linux Mint team announced [Friday] that the final release of version 10 of the free and open source operating system, dubbed "Julia," is now officially available.

Launched in 2006, Linux Mint has quickly become the third most popular Linux distribution out there behind only Ubuntu and Fedora, and version 10 makes it easy to see why. Based on Ubuntu 10.10, or Maverick Meerkat, Julia offers numerous enhancements that put it at the forefront of usability.

A new Welcome Screen, for instance, lets users install any multimedia codecs they might need right from the start as well as upgrade to the DVD edition, if necessary. Linux Mint has always stood out for its compatibility, thanks in large part to its inclusion of many proprietary multimedia codecs that are often absent from other distributions, and this new capability makes that compatibility even easier to ensure.

A revamped menu, meanwhile, highlights newly installed applications and adds support for GTK bookmarks and themes for easier customization. It's also now aware of what's available in the user's software repositories, meaning that they can search for software and install packages without even having to open the Software Manager.

Search capabilities are now directly integrated into the menu as well, so users can simply begin typing to look something up on Google or Wikipedia, for example. It's also now possible to look up words in the dictionary and find tutorials, software, hardware devices and even other Linux Mint users that way.

Then, too, there are the updates to Linux Mint 10's Software Manager, making packages easier to browse through and find. Software is now categorized more clearly, while application icons make them easier to recognize.

Also new in Julia is an Update Manager that lets the user tell the operating system if there are packages for which they're not interested in receiving updates. When updates are selected, the Update Manager now shows the size of the file about to be downloaded.

There's a new look and feel in Linux Mint 10, adding a metallic twist to the distribution's traditional light theme and dark background. A number of artist-created backgrounds are also available.

Under the hood, components include security-enhanced version 2.6.35 of the Linux kernel, GNOME 2.32 and Xorg 7.5. The speedy Adobe Flash "Square" is also part of Julia, as is a new metapackage called "virtualbox-nonfree" that points to the non-open-source version of Oracle's VirtualBox virtualization software and provides USB support.

Finally, for developers and administrators, Julia's Upload Manager has been polished with a raft of new improvements.

Following the debut of its release candidate last month, Linux Mint 10 is now available in 32-bit and 64-bit versions via Torrent and HTTP download. It will be supported through April 2012. The software requires an x86 processor with 512 MB of RAM and 4 GB of disk space for installation along with a graphics card capable of 800x600 resolution.

If you're curious about Linux Mint as a user-friendly alternative to Mac or Windows - or if you're an Ubuntu user who wants to see what Mint is like in light of all the big changes coming down the pike for Canonical's distribution - there's no better time to give Julia a try.

#### Facebook May Be Poised To Launch Email Service

Facebook, rumored for some time to be planning its own email service, may finally be on the verge of doing so in a move that would send a shot across the bow of Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft.

TechCrunch, a leading Silicon Valley technology blog, reported Friday that the social network plans to announce a Web-based email service complete with @facebook.com addresses at an event in San Francisco on Monday.

Agence France-Presse and other media outlets have been invited to Facebook's event but have not been told what it will be about.

Facebook boasts more than 500 million members around the world and offering a personal email service would lay down a powerful challenge to the established email giants - Microsoft's Hotmail, Yahoo! Mail and Google's Gmail.

Hotmail currently has the most users, 361.7 million as of September, according to online tracking firm comScore, followed by Yahoo! with 273.1 million and Gmail with 193.3 million.

TechCrunch said Facebook's planned Web-based email service is part of a secret project known as "Project Titan" that is "unofficially referred to internally as its 'Gmail killer.'"

"And while it may only be in early stages come its launch Monday, there's a huge amount of potential here," TechCrunch's Jason Kincaid noted.

The report comes amid a recent bout of sparring between Facebook and Google over data sharing and Silicon Valley engineering talent.

Google last week blocked Facebook from importing Gmail contact information over the Palo Alto, California-based social network's refusal to reciprocate and share data about its users.

And The Wall Street Journal reported that Internet search king Google, in a bid to stem defections to rival technology firms such as Facebook, has given all of its 23,000 employees a 10 percent pay hike.

According to the Journal, roughly 10 percent of Facebook's employees are Google veterans.

TechCrunch's Kincaid and others noted the advantages Facebook could bring to an email battle.

"Facebook has the world's most popular photos product, the most popular events product, and soon will have a very popular local deals product as well," Kincaid said.

"It can tweak the design of its webmail client to display content from

each of these in a seamless fashion.

"And there's also the social element: Facebook knows who your friends are and how closely you're connected to them; it can probably do a pretty good job figuring out which personal emails you want to read most and prioritize them accordingly," he said.

Gadget blog Gizmodo said the prospect of an email service from Facebook should make Google, Yahoo! and Microsoft "very nervous."

"Facebook Mail could be a killer not only because of its potential instant size, but because of its natural advantage at making mail more useful," Gizmodo blogger Jesus Diaz said.

"Actually, it may become the only 100 percent useful mail service out there, only showing you the email you are actually interested in," Diaz said.

"Since Facebook knows how you interact with all your contacts, they would be able to perfectly separate what is important from what is not."

"Of course, not every Facebook user will jump on its mail bandwagon," Diaz added. "But chances are that a huge percentage of the user base will."

#### Apple Releases Mac OS X 10.6.5

Apple on Wednesday released Mac OS X 10.6.5, the latest version of its Snow Leopard operating system. As per usual, the update - which is recommended for all users of 10.6 - is chock full of bug fixes, feature enhancements, and security patches.

Among the most prominent additions in 10.6.5 are improved reliability with Microsoft Exchange servers, better stability and performance of graphics applications and games, more robust pairing with Apple's Magic Trackpad, and improved reliability of Ethernet connections. There's also now SSL support for iDisk connections, a fix for an issue syncing Address Book contacts with Google, and added support for raw images from a metric ton of digital camera models.

In addition, the update brings plenty of other welcome changes, such as better performance in some iPhoto and Aperture image-processing operations, axing a delay between print jobs, a fix for a problem dragging Address Book contacts into iCal, improved performance of MainStage on certain Macs, resolution of spacing issues with OpenType fonts, better reliability with some Bluetooth braille displays, and a fix for a VoiceOver issue on some Websites when using Safari 5.

There's no mention in the release notes of AirPrint, Apple's forthcoming printing feature for iOS, adding weight to reports that Mac OS X 10.6.5 would not bring support for sharing printers with iOS devices.

Apple also released a 10.6.5 update for Mac OS X Server that includes a number of improvements and updates for the server software, including the ability to manage iChat and iCal preferences, improved reliability for Directory Services, an updated version of PHP, and the ability for the Software Update Services to allow administrators to host older software

updates (i.e. 10.6.4) after a new version is released (10.6.5, for example).

Mac OS X 10.6.5 and 10.6.5 Server are available now via Software Update - their size will vary depending on your Mac (my 2008 MacBook shows a 517.3MB update for 10.6.5 client).

\*Mac OS X 10.6.5\*

- \* Improves reliability with Microsoft Exchange servers.
- \* Addresses performance of some image-processing operations in iPhoto and Aperture.
- \* Addresses stability and performance of graphics applications and games.
- \* Resolves a delay between print jobs.
- \* Addresses a printing issue for some HP printers connected to an AirPort Extreme.
- \* Resolves an issue when dragging contacts from Address Book to iCal.
- \* Addresses an issue in which dragging an item from a stack causes the Dock to not automatically hide.
- \* Resolves an issue in which Wikipedia information may not display correctly in Dictionary.
- \* Improves performance of MainStage on certain Macs.
- \* Resolves spacing issues with OpenType fonts.
- \* Improves reliability with some Bluetooth braille displays.
- \* Resolves a VoiceOver issue when browsing some websites with Safari 5.
- \* Improves Bluetooth pairing with Magic Trackpad.
- \* Resolves performance issues with third-party displays that use InstaPort technology.
- \* Add SSL support for transferring files with iDisk.
- \* Resolves an issue when opening 4-up Photo Booth pictures in Preview.
- \* Addresses keyboard responsiveness issues in the Dock when Spaces is turned on.
- \* Resolves an issue syncing Address Book with Google.
- \* Fixes an issue when replying to a Mail message sent by a person whose name contains certain characters such as Ø or Ü.
- \* Improves performance for users bound to an Active Directory domain.
- \* Improves reliability of Ethernet connections.
- \* Systems with a Mac Pro RAID Card (Early 2009) installed can now be put to sleep. For more information, see Mac Pro RAID Card (Early 2009): Enabling system sleep.
- \* Improves reliability of fibre channel connections, resolving a potential Xsan volume availability issue.
- \* Adds RAW image compatibility for additional digital cameras.

#### Apple Exits Server Market

It's the end of the line for Apple's line of servers, the Xserve. The Cupertino giant has just announced that the Xserve line (no more future models, either) will no longer be sold after January 31, 2011, and advises people interested in Mac OS X Server to buy either a Mac Mini or a Mac Pro with Snow Leopard Server installed.

Support-wise, Apple will obviously fulfil all its duties. "Apple will continue to take orders for current Xserve models through January 31, 2011," Apple writes, "These systems will have Apple's full standard one-year warranty. The AppleCare Premium Service and Support program for

Xserve is available as an option at time of order to extend complimentary technical support and hardware service coverage to three years from the Xserve date of purchase."

There will be no replacement for the Xserve; instead, Apple advises interested customers to buy Snow Leopard-equipped Mac Minis or Mac Pros. I think that when Lion arrives, there will be no more separate server release - it'll be a single release, so you can just buy any device you want and turn it into a server.

#### IE9 Lags on Popular Websites

Speed is supposed to be a hallmark of Microsoft's Internet Explorer 9, but the head of a Web optimization firm says improvements are negligible on the most popular Websites.

For the top 200 Websites ranked on Alexa, Bixby found that the IE9 beta was just a hair faster than its predecessor on average first page load times, and a little bit slower on average first view renders.

On these measurements alone, Microsoft appears to have made its biggest advancements with Internet Explorer 8, not the latest version.

Hold on. What about JavaScript benchmarks that have pegged IE9 as considerably faster than IE8 and Firefox, and Microsoft's claims that its new "Chakra" JavaScript engine makes Websites faster and more responsive? Strangeloop Chief Technical Officer Kent Alstad doesn't think those claims come into play for many the Web's most popular sites.

"My conclusion is that IE9 is mostly aimed at HTML5 (especially CSS drawing) and JavaScript acceleration," he wrote in a note to Bixby. "I suspect that these sites [the Alexa Retail 200], in attempts to be faster and more usable to more people, do not exploit these enhancements."

In other words, IE9's speed gains are focused new techniques, such as HTML5 and Ajax, which may become popular in the future. Take a small grain of salt with Bixby's conclusion: Strangeloop is in the business of optimizing Websites, so Bixby's test conveniently ties into his company's business.

In any case, IE9 has more going for it than page load times. The browser sports a new, minimalist user interface that's more in line with Chrome and Firefox 4, and it allows Windows 7 users to dock Websites in the taskbar. And according to some tests by Engadget, IE9 starts up faster than its predecessor - but still slower than Chrome and Firefox - and consumes less memory than Chrome. With all these improvements, IE9 feels faster even if individual Websites don't show it.

#### Queen Elizabeth Officially Joins Facebook

Although you can't exactly poke her, Queen Elizabeth is now among the more than 500 million members of Facebook.

The British Monarchy on Monday launched its own Facebook fan page to provide news and information about the royal family.

More than 74,000 people have already "liked" the Facebook page. With it, users can see pictures of different members of the family, can get updates through their News Feed, and find events in their area.

Britain's royal family isn't new to social networking. In 2007, it set up a YouTube channel. The monarchy has been tweeting under the @BritishMonarchy handle since 2009, and announced that the Facebook page was live on the micro-blogging site. Earlier this year, the royal family expanded its online presence with an official photostream on image-sharing site Flickr.

"If you look at the royal forays into technology and social media, we were already pretty much everywhere," a spokesman for the royal family said in a Time report. "Facebook was really the last area we didn't have a presence."

A two-person team manages the monarchy's Facebook page. This same team also monitors the other three online profiles as well as the British royal family's official Web site. Shortly after the page went live at 8 Greenwich Mean Time, the team was already sifting through potentially offensive comments, according to Time. With a growing number of Facebook fans, however, the reception from users has been mostly positive.

#### Feds: Woman Illegally Fired over Facebook Remarks

A Connecticut woman who was fired after she posted disparaging remarks about her boss on Facebook has prompted a first-of-its-kind legal case by federal authorities who say her comments are protected speech under labor laws.

The National Labor Relations Board alleges that American Medical Response of Connecticut Inc. illegally fired Dawnmarie Souza from her job as an emergency medical technician late last year after she criticized her supervisor on her personal Facebook page and then traded Facebook messages about the negative comments with other employees.

The complaint, filed Oct. 27 by the board's Hartford, Conn., regional office, could set a precedent for employers to heed as more workers use social networking sites to share details about their jobs.

"It's the same as talking at the water cooler," said Lafe Solomon, the board's acting general counsel. "The point is that employees have protection under the law to talk to each other about conditions at work."

Federal labor law has long protected employees against reprisal for talking to co-workers on their own time about their jobs and working conditions, including remarks that may be critical of managers. The law applies whether or not workers are covered by a union.

NLRB officials claim the Connecticut ambulance company has an unlawful policy that prohibits employees from making disparaging remarks about supervisors and depicting the company "in any way" over the Internet without permission.

"This is the first complaint we've issued over comments on Facebook, but I have no doubt that we'll be seeing more," Solomon said. "We have to

develop policies as we go in this fast-changing environment."

The trouble for Souza started when her supervisor asked her to prepare an investigative report when a customer complained about her work, according to the complaint. Souza claimed she was denied representation by her union, the Teamsters Local 443.

Later that day, Souza logged onto her Facebook page from a home computer and wrote: "Looks like I'm getting some time off. Love how the company allows a 17 to be a supervisor."

A 17 is the code the company uses for a psychiatric patient. Souza also referred to her supervisor with two expletives. Her remarks drew supportive Facebook postings from other colleagues.

John Barr, an attorney representing the company, said the real reason Souza was fired was because of two separate complaints about her "rude and discourteous service" within a 10-day period. He said Souza would have been fired whether the Facebook comments were made or not.

Barr said the company understands that workers have right to talk about wages and working conditions. But he said it stands by its policy against employees discussing the company on the Internet, including social media sites.

"If you're going to make disgusting, slanderous statements about co-workers, that is something that our policy does not allow," Barr said.

Jonathan Kreisberg, director of the board's regional office in Hartford, said the company's policy is overly broad. He acknowledged that the law protecting worker speech has some limits, such as not allowing employees to disrupt the workplace or engage in threatening conduct. But Kreisberg argued that Souza's Facebook comments did not cross a legal line.

"Here she was on her own time, on her own computer and on her own Facebook page making these comments," Kreisberg said. "If employees are upset about their supervisor and get together on their own time talk about him, criticize and call him names, they can do that."

A hearing on the case before an administrative law judge is set for Jan. 25.

#### New Cyber Attack Linked to Nobel Peace Prize

A fake email invitation to this year's Nobel Peace Prize ceremony is currently circulating and carrying with it a virus capable of infecting the computer of anyone who opens it, computer security experts warned.

Appearing to come from the Oslo Freedom Forum, a group with no direct Nobel ties, the email includes a PDF attachment containing a so-called "Trojan horse," allowing hackers to take control of victims' computers, reported the Contagio Internet security blog (<http://contagioudumb.blogspot.com>).

"Dear Sir/Madame. I enclose a letter from Oslo Freedom Forum founder Thor Halvorssen inviting you to join him in Oslo for the December 11th (sic) prize ceremony. Let me know if you have any questions," the email reads.

The 2010 Nobel Peace Prize, which was attributed in October to jailed Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo, much to the distaste of Beijing, is to be handed over at an official ceremony in Oslo on December 10.

"We don't know who launched the attack, or who the target was," the F-Secure computer security group said on its website.

According to daily Aftenposten's online edition, Nobel Institute director Geir Lundestad has meanwhile been the target of a cyber attack through an email that appeared to come a technician at a IT company working for the institute.

The email reportedly contained a link requesting him to type in his user name and password, but Lundestad had become suspicious and alerted Norwegian data security authorities.

"There is someone trying to infect the Nobel Institute," the head of the Norwegian Computer Emergency Response Team, Christophe Birkeland, told the paper.

"There is a lot to indicate that the same person is behind these attacks," he added.

The Nobel Peace Prize website ([www.nobelpeaceprize.org](http://www.nobelpeaceprize.org)) was also the target of a cyber attack two weeks ago, with the last IP address used in that attack belonging to the National Chiao Tung University in Taiwan.

However, there is no way of knowing if the attack actually came from there, since hackers often used many computers to hide their traces.

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